Minneapolis Urban Farmers Collaborative
Candidate Questionnaire: 2013
Candidate: Andrew Johnson for Minneapolis City Council, Ward 12 (AndrewMpls.com)

Urban agriculture city code amendments passed Minneapolis city council in spring of 2012 and laid the groundwork for urban farms to take root. In the year since these new rules have been in place many small businesses have endeavored to grow, sell, prepare, and compost hundreds of thousands of pounds of Minneapolis produced fruits and vegetables. This spring, the urban farmers and residents that rely on their food would like to enhance the growing environment for urban farms in Minneapolis. The following initiatives and rule changes would nourish and enrich this growing movement.

## Do you as a candidate for -Mayor, City Hall- support the following initiatives and rule changes in order to promote urban farming in Minneapolis?

- The current MPLS chicken ordinance only allows chickens in residential back yards. Many urban residents would like to purchase eggs and chicken from urban farms, and urban farmers could use the proceeds from chicken farming to support their urban farms in the winter months. **Do you as a candidate support allowing chickens as livestock at urban farms?**

Yes! And I support using a 3rd party, such as Animal Welfare Approved, to perform audits on livestock welfare rather than repurposing Minneapolis Animal Control and fitting chickens into the existing framework for pet ownership, which imposes fees that can be cost prohibitive. I am also very interested to see if we can come up with a reasonable policy for allowing hoofed animals.

- Urban farm sites often don't have water spigots and in most cases urban farmers purchase water from neighbors to water their plots. **Will you as a candidate work to build affordable access to city water hydrants and support city cost assistance for water for urban farmers and community gardens?**

Yes! Affordable access to water is one of several factors which influences whether a site is economically viable or not for urban farming. I would advocate for grants and financial support via the city to increase affordable access. I would also advocate that Gardening Matters be granted authority to approve water access for urban farms just as they do for community gardens.

- Urban land is priced too high for urban farming to be financially sustainable. Most urban farms are leasing land without any guarantee that they'll be able to continue leasing year to year. Urban farm sites need years of fertility building before they become highly productive. **Do you as a candidate support creating a city pilot program for leasing public lands for urban farming?**

Yes! The city holds a good amount of land, especially after recent price declines in the real-estate market, and as demand for city living continues to increase, I believe it is vital to protect as much land as possible (and procure more when appropriate) for urban farming. I would like to explore putting this land into a community land trust for urban farming, and at

minimum offer long-term affordable leases on the land, contingent on active use, in order to encourage stronger investment in the farm sites and provide farmers with greater stability. In addition, property taxes need to be reduced to reflect the use of land for farming and its value in maintaining healthy communities. I also support year-round hoop houses and increasing their allowed height.

- Urban farmers and family owned businesses rely on their work vehicles to run their local businesses. It is currently illegal by city code to park work vehicles on the street in Minneapolis, resulting in hundreds of family owned businesses being fined for parking in front of their homes. Will you as a candidate support small businesses by removing barriers to on street and off street parking of contractor work vehicles and trailers?

Yes! Small businesses and urban farmers with reasonably-sized vehicles (trucks, vans, and trailers) should be exempt from this ordinance. I wouldn't want to see it opened to the point of allowing a semi-truck and its trailer to be parked daily in front of a home.

- Urban gardeners and farmers who wish to sell produce to neighbors now have to apply for a costly permit to sell vegetables. This permit only allows for 15 days of on-site sales per year, and when seeking a permit, farmers must pre-schedule their sales days. Since weather, climate, and variations in growing seasons affect production of vegetables it is almost impossible to predict when will be the best days to sell vegetables. Additionally if one farmer runs multiple sites, that farmer must apply for multiple permits to have sales from each site. These restrictions mean that valuable produce is going to waste even while there is a high demand for purchasing it within the neighborhoods. Will you as a candidate support the local food system by easing the permitting process for on-site vegetable sales, by reducing permit fees, increasing the amount of days farmers can sell, and allowing produce sales from multiple farm sites?

Yes! These restrictions are absolutely ridiculous! I can't imagine any business which would only be allowed to sell their goods for 15 days out of the year. I would seek to remove all restriction as to the number of days, along with reducing (if not altogether eliminating) permit fees.

Broad vision question:

As a candidate for public office, what would you like the food economy of Minneapolis to look like in 2017?

In terms of what is achievable within the next four years, I would like to resolve every one of the issues mentioned above which are holding back urban agriculture in Minneapolis and making many farm sites economically unviable. In addition, we have opportunities to improve composting ordinances.

Beyond that, I would propose that we establish a city program to create apprenticeships for Minneapolis youth to learn how to farm over the summer. There is no better way to make a gardener for life, or establish a healthy relationship with food, than to get one's hands dirty in a garden and raise vegetables from seed to plate. It is essential for the next generation that we give as many of them as possible the opportunity for this experience.

I would like to see city-owned space used to pilot a co-op indoor community garden that uses LED arrays to enable year-round farming. We should also find ways for our local government to source more food from urban farms and encourage local businesses to.

We have incredibly talented and passionate local farmers who I will work with, listen to, and solicit ideas from. How can the city promote greater use of heirloom varieties and organic farming methods? Would you like the city to help establish co-op food banks and cold storage? Can we incentivize the use of food stamps on locally grown food? How can we better use the city's communication vehicles to drive local food consumption? What can the city include in their lobbying agenda to help influence changes to state laws that benefit urban farmers? Is a ban on pesticides and herbicides something you would support?

In 2017 I see us taking the lead, nationally, for our support of urban agriculture, it's prevalence, and our innovative pilots which seek to break new ground…from utilizing technology to facilitate local food distribution networks and establish year-round growing spaces, to establishing large farming sites and introducing as many youth as we can to the rewards of gardening.

---

Beyond the answer for 2017

One of my dreams is to partner with passionate architects and pave the way for piloting the construction of multi-use building structures that promote urban agriculture. I envision the potential of an alternative to today's garage that doubles as a greenhouse, using materials that collect thermal energy during the day and radiate it overnight, allowing for year-round growing. These structures would provide space for vehicles as well as recreation, doubling as dining rooms, reading rooms, or offices. Attached to a house, they could drastically reduce energy consumption for heat in the winter, similar to the home of the Amory Lovins, co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Institute.

Within Longfellow, I am working to help create the nation's first community hops garden for local brewers. And as the next city council member for Ward 12, I will take an active role in advancing urban agriculture. I will work with other council members and our next mayor to convince them why these changes will benefit all of Minneapolis, and I would be honored to have your active support and partnership in doing so.